

FINDINGS

New Approaches Boost Food Stamp Participation by Elderly People

USDA's Food Stamp Program (FSP) is designed to enable low-income Americans to buy nutritious foods. However, not all who are eligible to participate do so. Just over half (54 percent) of all eligible people participated in fiscal year 2002, and only about one in four eligible elderly people participate. These low participation rates might signal that barriers exist for elderly people in accessing the FSP. In 2002, USDA and six States tested approaches to increasing participation by low-income elderly through three demonstration projects. Simplifying the application process, helping the elderly complete the process, and substituting food packages for food stamps boosted participation.

In the first demonstration project, two counties in Florida simplified the applica-



tion process by using a one-page, large-print application form. Applicants were required to prove their citizenship, but many other FSP documentation requirements were eliminated. Face-to-face interviews were waived, and social security income was verified electronically using existing databases.

In the second project, special application assistants in four counties in Arizona, Maine, and Michigan worked one-on-one with elderly applicants to help them understand program requirements, assemble required documents, and complete the application.

The final demonstration project offered elderly households without nonelderly members the choice of receiving packages of USDA-supplied foods in place of food

stamps. Local nonprofit organizations in the Hartford, CT, area and Alamance County, NC, assembled the packages and delivered them to demonstration project participants at congregate meal sites, food banks, and other places where low-income elderly are likely to gather. Participants with disabilities or transportation difficulties could have their packages delivered to their homes.

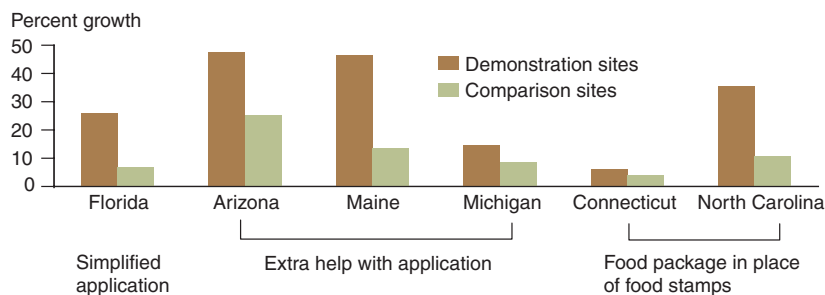
To estimate the impact of the demonstration projects, growth in participation at the demonstration sites was compared with participation growth at demographically similar comparison sites and the difference was attributed entirely to the demonstration projects. Preliminary findings show that growth in FSP participation by eligible elderly at the demonstration sites outpaced participation growth at the comparison sites, although differences varied by project and by State. For example, providing one-on-one assistance to elderly applicants boosted participation 33 percentage points more at the demonstration site than at the comparison sites in Maine, 22 points more in Arizona, and 6 points more in Michigan. Future analyses will refine and test the validity of these preliminary estimates. W

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This finding is drawn from . . .

Food Stamp Program—Elderly Nutrition Demonstrations: Interim Report on Elderly Participation Patterns, by Scott Cody, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., ERS project representative: Elizabeth Dagata, E-FAN-04-009, USDA/ERS, June 2004, available at: www.ers.usda.gov/publications/efan04009/

Growth in elderly FSP participation was higher in demonstration sites



Hog Contracts Signal Producers To Improve Quality

Nearly 70 percent of hogs in the U.S. are sold to pork slaughter companies (packers) under pre-arranged marketing contracts, up from 11 percent in 1993. Marketing contracts between packers and hog producers typically specify the quantity of hogs to be purchased on specified dates and places, and provide hog producers a secure outlet and specific pricing terms. Many of these contracts awarded price premiums for carcass leanness and weight, providing strong incentives for producers to raise lean hogs needed for the lower fat meats demanded by consumers. From 1992 to 2002, the percentage of lean muscle of a typical pork carcass rose from 49.5 to 55.5 percent.

But this leanness came at a cost. The genetic lines that produced leaner hogs were often carriers of the "stress" gene, which was linked to a condition referred to as "pale, soft, and exudative" (PSE). PSE pork—which is disliked by packers, retailers, and consumers—has a very light color, soft texture, and is subject to fluid loss. Controlling the PSE condition proved to be difficult because packers must be able to measure and reward producers for reducing PSE-related attributes. However, indicators of the PSE condition could not be readily measured at high-speed processing lines that slaughter 1,000 hogs per hour. In addition, by the time PSE problems become apparent (20-24 hours post-mortem), the identity of the producer may have been lost.

Barry Runk/Grant Heilman Photography

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